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Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
NEW DIRECTORS

— DAUGHTER OF RAGE

A Film by Laura Baumeister

PRESSKIT



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DAUGHTER OF RAGE

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— SYNOPSIS

Nicaragua, today.

11-year-old Maria lives with her mother Lilibeth at the edge of a garbage dump. Their future depends on selling a litter of purebred puppies to a local thug. When the deal falls through, Lilibeth must go to the city and drops Maria off at a recycling center where she must stay and work.

But days pass and she doesn't return. Maria feels lost, bewildered and angry. One night, Maria meets Tadeo, an imaginative new friend who is determined to help her to reunite with her mother.

A CONVERSATION WITH LAURA BAUMEISTER



What is the starting point for *Daughter of Rage*?

The starting point for *Daughter* was a specific place: La Chureca, the biggest open-air landfill in Nicaragua. I first went there as a teenager and couldn't get it out of my head. The contrast between tons of garbage and one of my country's most beautiful landscapes—the great lake Xolotlán's coast and its mountainous relief—really shocked me and led to a number of questions. The other thing that really touched me was the people, those living in the dump. Particularly their ability—their creative force—to reappropriate and reinterpret objects in order to give them a second use. At that moment, I was working a lot with found 'ready-made' art and video-installation, and suddenly there, in the least elegant and respected place within the art world, I found myself surrounded by people who involuntarily transformed objects so as to extend their life cycle. These contradictions—garbage versus nature, waste versus art—stayed with me. I would wake up wondering about the human condition, about people's creative drive. And when I finally had to commit myself with a place from which to speak about the separation between a daughter and her mother, I knew it had to be La Chureca.

How did you cast the main young actress? She's a real discovery!

Indeed, Aracely was a real discovery. We were preparing to shoot with another girl, but the pandemic delayed the project, and she'd grown up so much mentally and physically that she was no longer suitable for the role. By this point, we—together with the casting director—had created a data base of more than 200 boys and girls from the area, meant to play secondary characters, bits, etcetera. The outstanding Aracely was among them. She had auditioned to play one of the kids who appear at the garbage shed with the Evangelical preacher, but she really stood out—she had this presence, this magnetism. "She's a girl you really want to

see," the cinematographer told me. And, with that in mind, we did a few scenes and exercises with the actress that plays the mother. From there, we realized she had a wonderful potential not just to play the role, but that her personal story imprinted a lot of verisimilitude to Maria's character. We also realized she needed a lot of training, so we, together with the acting coach, designed a rehearsal plan that finally rendered the performance that you see on screen. Without a doubt, it was a collaboration. We are indebted to Aracely's commitment to the role and for trusting us.

par With Carlos Gutierrez (Tadeo), the process was similar, only that less intense since he was coming in with more tools and a more stable environment, so in that sense coaching him was to a certain extent less demanding. Then, with the professional actors we did several things, from table reads to rehearsals. The truth is we drew from multiple techniques in order to make everyone achieve the tone we wanted for each scene. Again, it was a very collaborative process.

Why did you want to explore a daughter-mother relationship? What were your references in terms of cinema for this story?

I am marked by the relationship I have with all the feminine forces that surround me, from my mother to myself, and that's why in nearly all my work I have explored the role of women within their family circles, as well as on an intimate level—what's expected, the psychosocial programming we inherit, and how this reifies or blurs what we understand as feminine. Now, as mammals, the mother-child bond is the strongest we have, it's the portal through which we come into the world, and we depend on that person for a long time—our survival depends upon it. And there's something about that fragility that interests me a lot: how does a child survive without their mother? How can a mother prepare her child for something so painful as her own disappearance? I often feel that human beings are way more resilient than we've been told, and that's why I wanted to talk

about an extreme situation in a harsh context, so that we could see how someone holds up against everyone's prediction.

For this, cinematographic references I was in dialogue with during the process of making *Daughter* were Koreda's *Nobody Knows*, Zeitlin's *Beats of the Southern Wild*, and Baker's *The Florida Project*.

While bringing on screen a tough reality that we are not used to seeing, you manage to create a poetical, positive narration. The film brings on screen some fantastic elements, why did you decide to get distanced with reality?

To begin with, for me reality is very subjective and is filled with individual perceptions, so I don't think I would've been able to create something that was strictly realist, because I frankly do not believe in that. Yet, speaking in more narrative and cinematographic terms, this story demanded that we enter into the protagonist's mind, her world view. I feel that it was only from her mindset and point of view that it'd be possible to see beyond the obvious—tragedy, poverty, lack. It's in our heads where worlds are built and once you truly decide to enter there, you realize that dreams, fantasies, and story-telling are crucial to how we relate to our environment and other people. While writing the script and exploring Maria's inner world, I felt that I could give her a break from her reality. This seemed to be profoundly enriching and necessary in order to be with her in her journey of survival.

Prior to being homo sapiens, we are homo spiritus, and by this I mean that we first imagine and then rationalize. Maria needed closure, she needed to know what happened to her mother. She doesn't want to be labeled as an orphan or an abandoned girl, so she makes up a story where her mother is feline-like. Now, does it hurt, will she still feel the loss? Of course she will. But she will also be able to live with this wound. To heal, she imagines that her mother has transmuted, that

she's another thing living in the realm of dreams. For me, this is not only really beautiful, but it seems to me that it empowers her, that it frees her from a social burden. Despite her precarious environment, Maria can choose—and ultimately chooses—her story, the one she'll tell herself to make her way in the world. In the end, we're all the stories that we tell ourselves, aren't we?

The sound and music are quite important to suggest the atmosphere, how did you work on it?

I had great collaborators: Jean-Baptiste de Laubier and Arthur Simonini in the score—I think they're geniuses and their contribution was wonderful. Together we built a musical universe. Throughout the process, it was very clear to us that we needed to accompany Maria emotionally and that she not only lives in a tangible world, but that she's also tied to the world of dreams. That's why we gave a spatial quality to many of the musical pieces. Regarding sound design, I was lucky to have worked with Lena Esquenazi, a master in blurring the lines between ambience sound and music, which is exactly what we were looking for. For most people, rubbish dumps have this unknown quality that allowed us to imagine, always from Maria's point of view, how that place could sound.

The story is told from the point of view of a child, and carries an imaginary filled with animals (puppies, tigers, magpies, etc.), caring characters, and a sort of magic atmosphere which reminds us of a tale. Can we consider *Daughter of Rage* as a modern social tale?

Yes, that's what *Daughter* is, without a doubt. I have to admit that, for me, childhood is a fascinating terrain, and that the films and stories I read or heard as a child continue to influence me—I go back to them every time I feel lost or overwhelmed. So that's why I also wanted to give a viscerally heartening story to the majority of boys and girls in places like my country, who despite living under extreme circumstances find

ways to resist. "*La imaginación como trinchera*" (Imagination as a trench), my collaborators and I would often say. I believe in this and tried to imprint such a spirit in the film.

The film raises environmental and political questions such as child labor, is it something that you feel should be more into light?

Definitely. Humans' environmental impact on the planet is overwhelming. When you stand in the middle of a dump that has generated garbage mountains—taller than natural mountains—and you can't see beyond them, it becomes clear that if we don't do something to stop consumption levels and overproduction, we're all gonna go to hell. To me that's a fact, and that's why it was very important that this place got shown, not just because it's in my country, but because all countries in the world have dumps. Sadly, that's something that makes us all equal, just like every human being is 70-80% water. Today, every city, every country has its own dump, so we have to see them—not deny them, not hide them. It's part of who we are, it's what humans are doing. I think that in order to heal and change things, we must first acknowledge our shadow—that which makes us feel ashamed or what we hide under the rug. I'd dare say that our wastes are in big part our shadow, so we have to see them and take responsibility. No matter how miserable or uncomfortable it makes us feel, we've all contributed to this situation.

Nicaragua isn't well known for its cinema, how did you manage to finance the film? It's co-produced by 5 European countries, was that decisive?

Indeed, Nicaragua has a very reduced filmography: suffice it to say that *Daughter* is one of the five fiction feature-length films of the last thirty or more years. Besides that, there aren't any national funds for cinema. Recently, there's Ibermedia, but in order to apply you need a co-production, so from the moment this project originated we knew that it'd be a tough

collaborative process that demanded a lot of strategic thinking, ability to persuade, and lots of flexibility. It didn't seem easy to meet our budget. But, as in every aspect of filmmaking, allies are key. Luckily, this film benefitted from very endearing accomplices, from my producers, Rossana Baumeister and Bruna Haddad—who are creative masters in the art of inventiveness, marketing, economizing, and good attitude—and our wonderful co-producers, who were very understanding and supportive from day one. To be honest, I feel that *Daughter* sparked a lot of curiosity: both the story and the different challenges the film presented drew people in, and I frankly can't complain, we've had a first-level team (person and professional wise). It wasn't easy, but there's no doubt it was worth it.

In LHTR, you portray a community that has been alienated from their main livelihood – contaminated *Lago Xolotlan*, the biggest lake in Nicaragua, turned into a public rubbish dump– and have now to live off collecting rubbish. Can you tell us more about your interest in working with such environmental issues, and how they have an impact in the social tissue of the region? Why did you find it important to portray this in LHTR?

I feel intrinsically drawn to transborder spaces—any place where there's a clash of interests, of worlds, of identities, is fascinating to me. Where does one thing start and the other end? The line between humans and animals, fantasy and reality, natural landscapes and social landscapes—all that captures my attention. I feel that in *Daughter* I had the opportunity to explore many of these questions, given that both the place and the characters' essence allowed it. From a sociopolitical perspective, I believe that broaching these topics is necessary because we come—we are the children of—a dichotomous, polarized, purist system where things are either this or that—let's say this is the modern paradigm—and I grew up under the social pressure and judgement that comes from these premises (revolutionary versus capitalist,

civilized versus savage, militant versus traitor, to mention but a few). This not only caused me a lot of problems on a personal level, but I have also seen the consequences it has had on my country—such separatist way of thinking, of opposites. So that's why, long ago, I committed myself as an artist and as a person to blur these lines, and hopefully, to make more flexible the way in which we relate with each other and with the environment.

All your shorts, as well as Daughter of Rage, have a significant presence of animals... It seems like you want to erase any hierarchy in how humans and animals interact. It also seems like you want to explore hidden emotions, or most precisely: how humans have been alienated from their body and capability to feel. Can you tell us more about this relationship?

As a girl, I used to keep a journal and one of the first entries I've got, when I could barely write, is: Dear Diary, my best friend is the chilamate tree in our garden's house and my teckel dog Pepe. For some reason I was born like this, connected to the natural world that surrounds me. I felt that I could talk to them, that they were with me more than anyone else. And, of course, to feel something like this in a world where animals and plants are deemed inferior generates a lot of anger, makes you feel misunderstood. As an adult, I can identify hierarchies, but I don't want to get stuck there. I'm really interested in making a kind of cinema that includes a diverse range of possibilities and identities. Even if these are considered the most peculiar or weird, to me they're all good as long as they don't hurt anybody. It's all right to think that you're a girl turning into a dog or that you're the daughter of a cat, if it helps you, if it frees you, if it makes your experience in the world easier, why not?



— BIOGRAPHY

LAURA BAUMEISTER

Director

Laura Baumeister was born in 1983, in Nicaragua, graduated in film directing in Mexico. She has written and directed several short films. Her short Isabel Im Winter was screened in Cannes Critic's Week 2014. Ombligo de agua/Water Navel has its world premiere at IFFR 2019. Daughter of Rage is her first feature, it premieres in TIFF 2022. Daughter of Rage is the fifth fiction film in the story of Nicaragua, the first to be shot by a female director born in Nicaragua.



— FILMOGRAPHY

LAURA BAUMEISTER

2022	DAUGHTER OF RAGE
2018	OMBLIGO DE AGUA/WATER NAVEL (SHORT) - IFFR
2016	FUERZA BRUTA
2014	ISABEL IM WINTER (SHORT) – CANNES CRITICS' WEEK
2013	LAGUNA
2012	KELATO
2011	THE SIESTA

CAST

María	Ara Alejandra MEDAL
Lilibeth	Virginia SEVILLA
Tadeo	Carlos GUTIERREZ
Raul	Noé HERNÁNDEZ
Rosa	Diana SEDANO

CREW

Director	Laura BAUMEISTER
Screenplay	Laura BAUMEISTER
Director of Photography	Teresa KUHN
Production design	Marcela GÓMEZ
Wardrobe design	Bea LANTÁN
Makeup Design	Eva RAVINA
Casting	Diana SEDANO
Edition	Julián SARMIENTO
	Raúl BARRERAS
Sound Design	Lena ESQUENAZI
Production Sound	Antonio DIEGO
Original Music	PARA ONE
	Arthur SIMONINI
Color Grading	Peter BARNAERS
Post producers	Javier VELASQUEZ
	Daan JANSSEN

— CREW

Production	Felipa Films
	Marthfilms
Co-production	Halal
	Heimatfilm
	Promenades Films
	Cardon Pictures
	Dag HOEL
	Nephilim Producciones
Producer	Rossana BAUMEISTER
	Bruna HADDAD
	Laura BAUMEISTER
	Martha OROZCO
Co-producers	Christine ANDERTON
	Gijs KERBOSCH
	Gijs DETERMEIJER
	Olivia Sophie VAN LEEUWEN
	Bettina BROKEMPER
	Samuel CHAUVIN
	Eri LEVIN
	Dag HOEL
	Jorge MORENO
	Luis COLLAR

Country	Nicaragua
	Mexico
	Netherlands
	Germany
	France
	Norway
	Spain
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

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